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AFRICAN CIVIL SOCIETY: PROSPECTS FOR RAISING AWARENESS ON PRIORITY ISSUES

Françoise Nduwimana

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Partnership Africa Canada

Partnership Africa Canada (PAC) is a coalition of Canadian and African organizations that work in partnership to promote sustainable human development policies that benefit African and Canadian societies.

The Insights series seeks to deepen understanding of current issues affecting African development. The series is edited by Bernard Taylor.

African Civil Society: Prospects for Raising Awareness on Priority Issues

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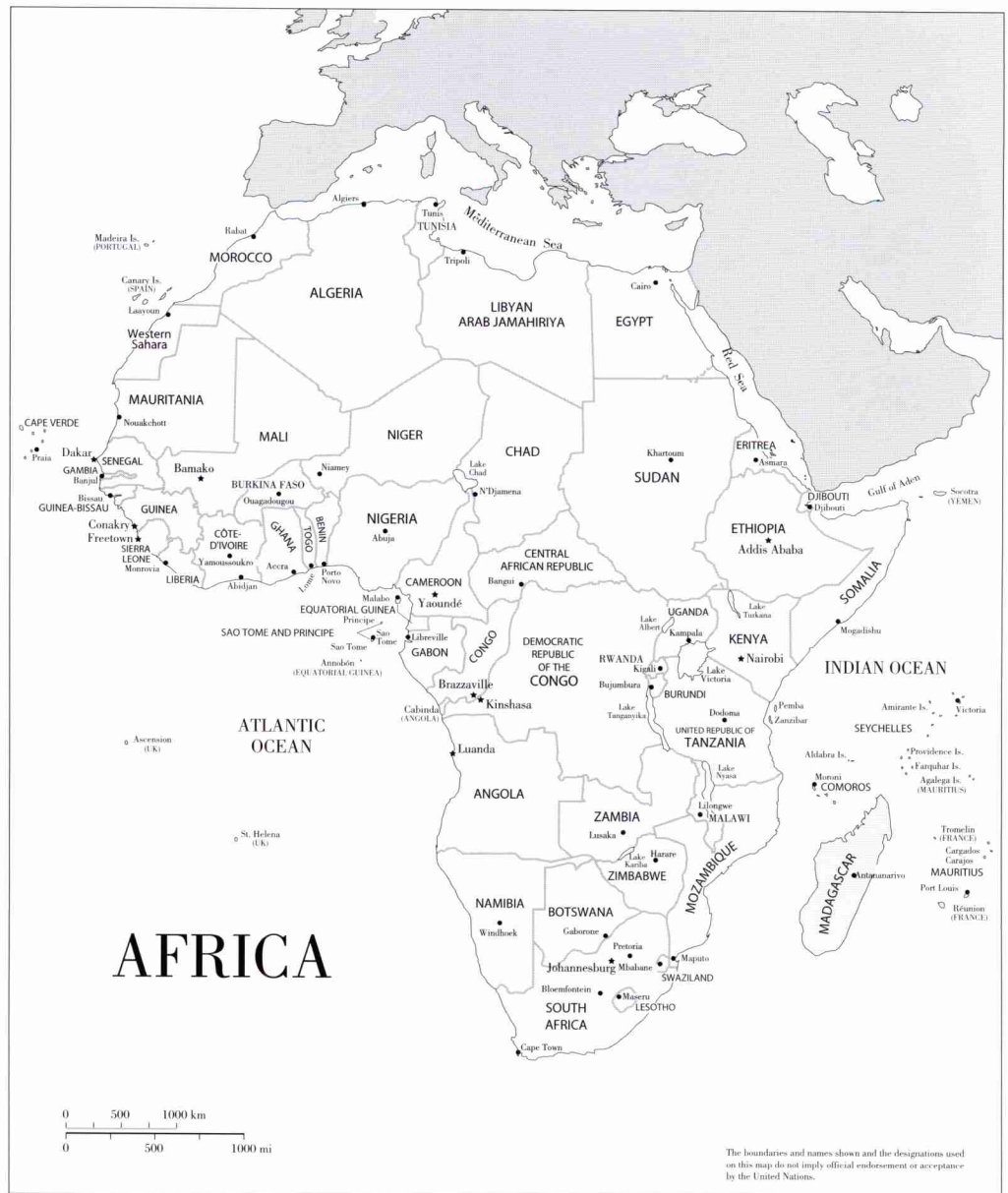
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AFRICAN
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FORWARD

Between September and November 2003, Partnership Africa Canada held a consultation process in Africa and Canada among its partner civil society organizations. Meetings were held in 12 cities in Africa and three in Canada, namely Bamako, Dakar, Conakry, Freetown, Yaoundé, Brazzaville, Kinshasa, Luanda, Johannesburg, Harare, Nairobi, Addis Ababa, Ottawa, Montreal and Toronto. These meetings enabled the establishment of an open dialogue with respect to priority development issues in Africa.

We asked Françoise Nduwimana to present her analysis of the findings of these meetings. The conclusions results are sure to have a meaningful impact should not leave anyone unconcerned. Africa is facing some enormous challenges, which may prompt some to wallow in a state of Afro-pessimism. However, taking this approach would mean ignoring the vast efforts of the populations concerned and the multiple causes of the crises shaking the continent. In her plea for change, Françoise Nduwimana echoes the exhortations of civil society organizations. Solutions to the crises in Africa can be found as easily in London as they can in Luanda, and no sustainable solution to these crises can be contemplated without the real cooperation of civil society organizations. This work is a call to action for each and every one of us, because we are all involved in and responsible for what is happening.

We would like to thank all those who participated in the consultations and in so doing contributed to the making of this publication. We are particularly grateful to the following organizations in Africa and Canada that lent their support to the organization of these consultations:

- Association du Sahel d'Aide à la Femme et à l'Enfance (ASSAFE), Bamako
- Réseau Africain pour le Développement Intégré (RADI), Dakar
- Network Movement for Justice and Development (NMJD), Freetown
- Centre du Commerce International pour le Développement (CECIDE), Conakry
- Confédération des ONG d'Environnement et de Développement d'Afrique Centrale (CONGAC), Douala
- Comité de Liaison des ONG du Congo (CLONG-Congo), Brazzaville
- Centre National d'Appui au Développement et à la Participation Populaire (CENADEP), Kinshasa
- Development Workshop/Grémio ABC, Luanda
- Innovations et Réseaux pour le Développement (IRED) and Action Aid, Johannesburg
- Innovations et Réseaux pour le Développement (IRED), Harare
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- Canadian Peacebuilding Co-ordinating Committee, Ottawa
- Canada World Youth and Oxfam-Québec, Montreal
- Save the Children Canada, Toronto

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INTRODUCTION

“We have, at last, achieved our political emancipation. We pledge ourselves to liberate all our people from the continuing bondage of poverty, deprivation, suffering, gender and other discrimination.”

Nelson Mandela

“The task is to awaken people’s awareness of the bright futures ahead.”

Léopold Sédar Senghor

Sub-Saharan Africa is grappling with such severe and recurring economic, political and social crises that some of them, including HIV/AIDS, food insecurity and civil war, have ended up as humanitarian disasters. Making such a statement is not indicative of a state of Afro-pessimism. Black Africa is not faring well—that is painfully clear to everyone. But this part of the world is nevertheless not committing suicide, as suggested by Stephen Smith.¹ It is putting up a fight. Evoking African resistance—and there is a resistance—against the destruction threatening the subcontinent is not a “crime against information.”²

Whether or not one subscribes to the principle of Afro-optimism, looking at Africa with hope does not mean ignoring the economic slump or the political deadlock affecting the vast majority of Africans. Such an approach aims to reveal what sensationalist news coverage too often neglects: the real efforts of men and women who are making a mark on history by building hope. There are millions of them, working within political circles, social movements or the ordinary masses, bearing this message for change.

Africa is not surrendering to globalization—it is mobilizing its forces. It is summoning local and international players to ensure that the values of equality and solidarity are incorporated into the world economic architecture. The African Social Forum is one of the examples that demonstrate a civil society poised to take shape, determined to promote global solidarity. On a more diplomatic note, and without putting the issue of globalization into question, African heads of state also plainly assert that the form and content of globalization were determined by developed countries, in partnership with the private sector. They therefore call for a reorientation of globalization, along a sustainable and equitable path.³

In terms of other challenges, Africa is not simply being subjected to armed conflicts, it is also trying to prevent and put an end to them. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, peace is admittedly fragile. But the transition under way is the result of a number of local, regional and international initiatives. Inter-Congolese dialogue, without which peace would not have been possible, has categorically shown that the contribution of civil society is vital to achieving peace and reconciliation.

Similarly, while the Darfur crisis reinforces the feeling of abandonment that African victims have always felt because of the procrastination of the international community, it also shows Africa’s clear willingness to play an active role in the crises shaking the continent. Under the auspices of the African Union Peace and Security Council, important decisions have been made in order to stop the humanitarian catastrophe afflicting this part of Sudan.

Although it is constantly being violated, the Agreement on the Modalities for the Establishment of the Ceasefire Commission and the Deployment of Observers in the Darfur, signed May 28, 2004, is one of the most important initiatives led by the Council.⁴ Under this agreement, an AU Observer Mission was

deployed in the field. The agreement also makes provisions for the deployment of a civil protection force which, according to the Council, could arise from the observer mission and be transformed into a full peacekeeping mission.⁵

The backdrop of contemporary crises in Africa is different than the context that prevailed during the colonial period. But a closer look reveals that it is no less representative of the failure of a world system built around a North-centric paradigm. Internally, these crises also convey the failure of a political culture marked by mismanagement, corruption and patronage. As Aminata Traoré points out, Sub-Saharan Africa is not poor—it has been impoverished.⁶ It is impoverished because today, like in the past, it is thrust into a system whose logic and rules of conduct have been defined by economic authorities that hold the reins of power. It is also impoverished because it has long been controlled by those who consider nations to be their private property.⁷

Faced with the rewriting of history, a history of the economic and political violence that prevailed under a variety of sophisticated forms,⁸ the renaissance of collective activism has become an integral part of recovery in Sub-Saharan Africa. However, in the context of post-colonial political and economic crises, collective activism is expressed in non-conventional ways. Dating back to the struggle for independence, public mobilization has been structured and shaped by political parties. The crises currently facing Sub-Saharan Africa, however, while they do convey the inequity in the North-South relations, also reveal the shortfalls in home-grown African political practices.

Regardless of the reasons—that the African state, via its governments, has been obliged to serve as a mere instrument of others' will, executing policies that do not take into account the real needs of African populations, which have resulted in a standstill; or that this state has, through the governments, meaning the political parties in power, behaved criminally—the fact is that the post-colonial state has not brought about the social justice that was at the heart of the dream of the independence movement. Political parties therefore can no longer be the only public mobilization structure, because they are the actual embodiment of the production of a state whose history is marked by the failure to realize this dream, and it is natural for public discontent to be directed toward them.⁹

The peoples of Africa, wrote Frantz Fanon, could not go on indefinitely using an instrumentalized nationalism, stripped of its political and social foundations: “The living expression of nationhood is the evolving conscience of all its people. [...] No leader, regardless of his or her value, can supersede public will, and national governments must, before concerning themselves with international prestige, restore the dignity of every citizen, fill their brains, fill their eyes with human things, develop a human programme for them as aware and sovereign individuals.”¹⁰

In this kind of a context, where public response is formed and deployed outside or alongside traditional structures, can we really speak of the renaissance of the African associative movement? The question is hardly a matter of consensus. But from the point of view of Samir Amin, we are witnessing the emergence of a new African conscience, defended by “*la société civile d'en bas*” or, roughly translated, “the civil society at the grass-roots level.”¹¹ In using this expression, the Egyptian economist and intellectual is describing what, in his view, constitutes the revival of the African associative movement, as opposed to the fractured social, economic and political conditions imposed by the current system on African societies.

Entrenching civil society at the grass-roots level therefore becomes a choice of political identification. The bottom of the pyramid is where the populations and their needs are found, as opposed to the top, where the leaders are and where the decisions are made. The place of civil society within the population thus determines the *raison d'être* and the role of the organizations that constitute it, namely to work toward the well-being of the population. This conviction is what has driven Partnership Africa Canada to strive to address the major grievances expressed by its partners in Africa.

I. PARTNERSHIP AFRICA CANADA CONSULTATIONS

During a series of consultations organized in October and November 2003 by Partnership Africa Canada (PAC), in Canada and 12 African cities, African voices spoke out on a number of civil-society-related issues of capital importance for Sub-Saharan Africa, namely peace, security, democratic development and economic development. A real commitment to promoting the involvement of civil society in political dialogue—that is the challenge that PAC partners issued to African leaders at both the regional and the national level.

Although there are many ways to approach the concept of civil society, the definition given by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which presents civil society as a sphere in which social movements become organized, appears to enjoy the broadest consensus.¹² Based on this framework, it seems that civil society is above all a melting pot of initiatives from independent groups, fuelled by the desire to drive social and political change. The associations and organizations that claim this status and that have taken part in the consultation process have two major characteristics in common, namely their non-profit and non-governmental nature. This dual independence vis-à-vis public authority and financial interests grants them the autonomy and credibility necessary to be political activists.

The 300 members of civil society organizations who participated in the PAC consultations boast a wide variety of profiles and mandates. They belong to different professional circles, scientific research networks or action groups on sustainable development, public participation, justice, environment, gender equality, etc. This includes NGOs, community groups, women's groups, trade unions and religious groups.

Because their *raison d'être* is founded in public apprehensions and aspirations, and because they focus essentially on righting the continent's social, economic and political wrongs, civil society organizations are, with or without grass-roots ties, defenders of a societal ideal rooted in social justice and human dignity. From this point of view, one could say that, in terms of political formations that act essentially via structures of representative democracy, civil society organizations broaden democratic practices, transforming them from a representative formula to a participatory one.¹³

This full scope of the new relationship between civil society and democracy must be grasped given that, as stressed by the working group on the relations between the United Nations and civil society, despite the fact that they increasingly acknowledge the contribution of civil society, governments paradoxically do not hesitate to contest the legitimacy of players that claim this role, arguing that they have no representative basis because they have not been elected.¹⁴ The question that needs to be raised is whether or not it is acceptable that the legitimacy of civil society is recognized solely when it occupies a terrain vacated by the state and contested when it questions the actions of the government.

The countries in Sub-Saharan Africa form a community of destiny with shared characteristics. But they also reflect a diversified array of climatic and geographic challenges, as well as social, economic, political and cultural realities that differ from one nation to the next. For example, mineral and/or natural resources that are found in abundance in Gabon, Cameroon, the two Congos, Sierra Leone, Angola, Nigeria, South Africa and others are in stark contrast to the absence of minerals in the majority of the Sahel countries.

From a geographical vantage point, landlocked countries such as Mali, Botswana, Burundi and Rwanda have no sea port, an important condition for economic viability and one that has considerable influence on the ability to attract private investors. This is not the case for Mozambique, Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, Senegal and so forth. Similarly, the issue of food insecurity does not affect all countries the same way. It is a problem primarily for countries ravaged by AIDS and in arid zones and countries marked by enduring armed conflicts.

In addition to these geographic and physical factors, it is important to stress another gap caused by the various levels of democratic development in Sub-Saharan Africa. While it is true that the democratization process has gained ground in Africa in the past decade, it is important to remember that in certain cases, such as Côte d'Ivoire and the Central African Republic, the steps backward have been more spectacular than the steps forward. Political violence, armed conflicts and upsets of democratic institutions monopolize the political landscape in Africa, to the extent that they obscure the positive advances that have been made in democratization.

The portrait that has been drawn here helps to understand not only the complexity of the fields covered by civil society in Africa, but also the various emphases placed on specific questions, depending on the importance they represent for some countries, although not necessarily for others. In fact, despite several similarities, the PAC consultations revealed that the challenges faced by civil society stakeholders in Congo-Kinshasa, Sierra Leone and Angola, three countries emerging from armed conflicts, are not identical to those encountered in civil society in Mali, Senegal and South Africa, all of which are governed by a democratically elected body. But the difference must be seen more from the angle of priorities than that of the importance placed on the challenges.

Although not exhaustive, given that everything is interdependent, peace, security, justice, return to constitutional order, democratization of political institutions and the respect of human rights constitute the core elements of civil society organizations in countries subject to war or dictatorship, whereas democratic governance and the reform of global economic architecture are issues that dominate civil society demands in countries plagued by corruption and other antidemocratic practices.

The men and women met during the consultation process are the architects of the well-being of the population. They incarnate the emergence of a new age in Africa—an age that promises to be increasingly active on public and political fronts, with dialogue that, although it may seem dissident to those in power, is nevertheless an alternative and constructive voice.

Civil society is often perceived as being ruled by antagonism, particularly as it pertains to local power. Such an interpretation of civil society is, however, a reductionist view. First, antagonism is an essential part of democratic vitality. This principle is what makes it possible to hold a contradictory debate. It does not shut out consensus. But although antagonism is a democratic principle, it is not a solution in and of itself. This principle does however allow civil society to break away from a vision, a system or a practice that does not put public well-being at the centre of the political decision-making process. It is because its existence is anchored in popular emancipation that civil society is a collective forum for political and social alternatives.

II. A POLITICAL ARENA WITH MORE AND MORE RECOGNITION

The role played by African civil society has been acknowledged repeatedly at the regional and international levels. In February 1990, the International Conference on Popular Participation in the Recovery and Development Process in Africa, held in Arusha and attended by some 500 members of grass-roots groups as well as representatives of NGOs, African governments and UN agencies, was an endeavour designed to build a shared vision of the role of public movements in the development process for Africa.

One of the major positive outcomes of this conference was the adoption by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) of the African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation (August 1990). Shaped by the necessity to take public opinion more into account in both the development and the political decision-making process, the charter was a first initiative that, step by step, reinforced the idea that the challenge of citizen participation is one of the cornerstones of democracy.

A decade after the enactment of this charter, under the OAU/AU initiative, three conferences designed to develop a collaborative framework between African civil society and the OAU were organized in Addis Ababa in June 2001, June 2002 and June 2004. In the words of Mr. Amara Essy, then Secretary General of the OAU, “The convocation of this second conference, the day before the launch of the African Union, underscores the determination of the OAU/AU to adapt to the evolving world environment and the growing role and legitimacy of civil society in this context.”¹⁵

From these conferences was born the Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC), an advisory body to the AU, that, once operational, will serve as an official civil society forum. The participants at the third African Union Civil Society Forum adopted a declaration, in which they reaffirmed the commitment of civil society organizations to work with the African Union.¹⁶ However, as the declaration stipulates, this commitment will be more meaningful when the design and organization of the Forum is in the hands of the actual members of civil society. This will involve the enactment of statutes by the Economic, Social and Cultural Council.¹⁷ As an entity created by the African Union to establish a solid partnership between the various government bodies and all the components of civil society (section 2, paragraph 2), and to promote the participation of African civil society in the implementation of AU policies and programmes (section 2, paragraph 3), the ECOSOCC is the very embodiment of African determination to acknowledge civil society as one of the credible ties between government and the public.

Again at the regional level, in what some consider a new slant to the pledge of African leaders to vital issues regarding the future of the continent, the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) formally conditioned the success of its project designed to ensure the appropriation of the project by the people of Africa.¹⁸ The forum brought together 80 members of civil society as well as government representatives and many others. Held in Ghana in March 2003, the event was in keeping with the same perspective to strengthen the partnership between civil society and African political authorities.

According to the NEPAD Secretariat, such a partnership with civil society has already been fully consummated. In its newsletter, the Secretariat even goes so far as to say that, “From now on, NEPAD will be benefiting from the full support of trade unions, civil society groups and the leading professional organizations.”¹⁹ This enthusiasm is, however, far from being unanimous. Criticism has poured in from all directions, targeting the lack of transparency in the creation and development of NEPAD. In addition to these criticisms about the closed-door approach, other equally credible voices of protest have been raised against the neoliberal postulate underlying NEPAD. NEPAD is certainly not a programme; rather it is a statement of intent and a pledge, subject to the national appropriation process. However, the fact remains that it is difficult to adopt a political vision when the ideological foundation is not shared.

At the international level, the UN has acknowledged the role of civil society on numerous occasions. The two most recent large-scale initiatives launched by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan were the constitution of the Panel of Eminent Persons on the relations between the UN and civil society and the appeal launched on the occasion of the Millennium Declaration. The objective of the Secretary General and the UN, via the first initiative (the working group on the relations between the United Nations and civil society), is to guide member countries as they rethink multilateralism and global governance, beyond the intergovernmental level, by integrating civil society into the equation. Under the second initiative, the Millennium Declaration, 191 member countries of the UN have solemnly agreed to “develop strong partnerships with the private sector and with civil society organizations in pursuit of development and poverty eradication.”²⁰

Devoted to fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals, the 2003 report of the UNDP also grants special attention to the contribution of civil society to the accomplishment of these goals. From the outset, the report underscores that “civil society groups—from community organizations to professional associations to women’s groups to networks of non-governmental organizations (NGOs)—have an important role in helping to implement and monitor progress towards the Goals.”²¹

Given that political will is intimately linked to and fuelled by public will, the 2003 UNDP report posits that individual commitment, a result of this public will, is efficient only if it is carried out under a well-organized civil society.²² The report goes even further to state that “one significant area of progress over the past decade has been the growing influence of local, national and global civil society organizations and networks in driving policy change.”²³ Among other examples, the report mentions issues related to debt relief, poverty reduction and the fight against AIDS, areas in which civil society has been particularly active.

Similarly, the OECD advocates an inclusive dialogue that reflects diversity: “One of the major issues will consist of striking the right balance between the activities related to pan-African dialogue and those to be led at the regional or national level. In addition, it will also be possible to organize activities in a way that favours the association of civil society representatives (NGOs, trade unions and the private sector).”²⁴

Based on the preceding observations, one might believe that the recognition of civil society is an issue that has been settled. However, as was echoed in the consultations organized by PAC with its African partners, the reality is that this is not altogether the case. Two major challenges are worth focusing on in this regard. The first is the outcome and implementation of this regional and international recognition at the national and local levels. The second is the trap of an “incorporated” form of recognition, i.e., one that is subject to terms that have been pre-established by political leaders and that builds on the confusion between participation in the dialogue and execution of previously adopted decisions.

III. RECOGNITION REMAINS INADEQUATE

At the national level, political will toward civil society leaves a lot to be desired. This was indicated clearly by a number of participants at the PAC consultations, in particular those who met in Addis Ababa and Johannesburg. After having indicated that civil society organizations represented all the layers of the population and that their in-depth knowledge of basic problems was an asset for their participation in the development and implementation of policy, the partners who met in Addis Ababa criticized the absence of a permanent legal process that would ensure the participation of civil society in the definition and enactment of development policy in Ethiopia.

For their part, the participants in the Johannesburg session vehemently spoke out against the lack of consideration by the South African government to alternatives supported by social and democratic movements. The about-face of the ANC, elected in 1994 on a social justice platform²⁵ known as the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) which, two years later, was replaced by the Growth Employment and Redistributive (GEAR) Programme, which was slanted more toward boosting the market²⁶ than promoting social justice, was a source of a great deal of bitterness in civil society.

In terms of civil and political rights, the signs of suspicion toward civil society are even more palpable. While professional organizations, i.e., those who deliver services to the population, and research groups do not attract a great deal of anger from those in power with whom they interact, it is quite another story for those associations that defend civil and political rights.

In many countries in the grips of non-democratic regimes, attempts to intimidate, silence and repress civil society are commonplace. Such an attitude reflects the confusion that is often deliberately sown between civil society and political opposition. In terms of the political repression present in Africa, Amnesty International, in its 2003 report, stated that harassment was practiced against human rights advocates in Cameroon, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Chad, Togo and Zimbabwe.²⁷ Intimidation of civil rights and political activists is rampant in Africa and has led to the creation by the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights of the position of Commissioner in charge of overseeing the protection of human rights activists. The first person to hold this title is Ms. Jainaba Johm.

This aspect of the marginalization of civil society constitutes a major obstacle to the introduction of constitutional states. Marginalization is a practice designed to quash opinions that differ from the ideas held by those currently in power and reveals, by extension, a failure in the distribution and balance of power. The concentration of decision-making power in the hands of the Executive, which depending on the case can be combined with that of the presidency, frequently results in an indecisive election outcome for both the opposition and legislative and judiciary authorities, the cornerstones of democratic government.

Thus controlled, policy is established not through popular participation but through presidential power. This phenomenon, which speaks volumes about how democracy can be diverted, is not restricted to Africa. It is the result of an extensive political transformation that, worldwide, has seen the imposition of ad hoc decision-making structures outside the influence of democratically formed policy-making institutions.

The overhaul of the political system goes hand in hand with the attempt to make parliaments more dynamic and accountable since they constitute one of the prime arenas for political deliberation. Thanks to a number of public consultation mechanisms, including parliamentary commissions, National Assemblies should, in principle, act as a sort of an “agora” for civil society.

“One of the major issues will consist of striking the right balance between the activities related to pan-African dialogue and those to be led at the regional or national level.”

UNDP, Human Development Report 2003.

What is happening in Africa, where NEPAD, a theoretical framework that will have an impact on the future of the continent, was developed without the input of elected officials or other political partners, is the African take on the global trend that continues to bypass the democratic process in favour of political patronage. In April 2001, for example, during the Summit of the Americas, the majority of elected officials from Africa, the Americas, civil society as a whole and all the peoples of the Americas were completely in the dark about the content of the project that would potentially lay down the foundations for the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

It was with enormous frustration that the Speaker of the Quebec National Assembly and Founder of the Parliamentary Conference of the Americas (COPA) condemned what was, in his view, the very embodiment of authoritative and absolutist behaviour. In the words of Mr. Charbonneau, by driving a wedge between elected officials and civil society, the 34 heads of state of the Americas were acting like “monarchs elected to the heads of politico-technocratic oligarchies.”²⁸

Such a comparison can be transposed from one continent to another. During the NEPAD Civil Society Forum, held in Burkina Faso, the 80 representatives from Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, via the Declaration of Ouagadougou,²⁹ exposed a number of serious violations including NEPAD’s silence as to the necessity for African parliamentary institutions to fully exercise their powers. This same criticism can be found in practically all declarations made on this topic by civil society.

The fact remains that the existence of the Parliamentarians’ Forum for NEPAD, as well as the implementation in March 2004 of the Pan-African Parliament by the African Union, speaks to the recognition of the importance of the participation of elected officials in the conduct of African political affairs. The protocol leading to the

creation of the Pan-African Parliament clearly states that this is “a common platform for African peoples and their grass-roots organizations to be more involved in discussions and decision-making on the problems and challenges facing the Continent.”³⁰

However, there are three criticisms to make here. First, the frameworks may potentially overlap. The Parliamentarians’ Forum is an initiative of NEPAD, whereas the Pan-African Parliament is a body of the African Union. How will the two entities adjust their respective mandates to one another? The question remains unanswered. Second, for the first five years of its operation, the brand-new Pan-African Parliament will operate under a purely advisory mandate. This very limited leeway makes its effectiveness questionable. Third, it is important to remember that the mandate of the parliamentary assemblies, at both a regional and a national level, is not only to implement policies that have already been devised but also to participate in the development of legislative measures that benefit the public and to ensure that these measures are applied by the Executive.

A mandate of this nature requires the prior existence of reliable studies and the ability to hold debates on the structural causes of African problems and possible solutions. Because of their knowledge of issues, proximity to living environments and experience, civil society stakeholders are invaluable partners in this process. The least we can say is that NEPAD has avoided making a decision on the intrinsic causes that have led the African continent to become what it is today. By remaining silent on the reasons for the failure of the development plans that preceded it, NEPAD is reinforcing doubts about its own chances for success.

IV. NECESSITY OF A STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF MAJOR AFRICAN ISSUES

Which economic system are we discussing? Which political crises are we looking into? Which rifts do we have to deal with? And, most important, which alternatives are out there to restore hope? These are the kinds of questions that members of civil society tried to answer during the PAC consultation process.

Many trends intermingle when it comes to development problems in Africa. We will focus here on two. The first trend blames Africa’s development failures on internal factors, i.e., organized crime, political tyrants, corruption and patronage rampant in certain national regimes in Africa. In what could be considered as an anthropological interpretation of power struggles, Jean-François Bayart analyzed African crises in 1989 from the standpoint of the “politics of the belly.”³¹ As a criticism of African political patronage, this work is commendable for having situated the phenomenon of favouritism in a broader context, one of the traits of which is the grey area between the management of the affairs of the state and personal economic prosperity.

Compared to the work of Bayart, who did not limit despotism to purely intrinsic African causes, other analyses are less subtle. Among the most controversial analysts have been Axelle Kabou and, more recently, Stephen Smith. Based on the availability of natural resources that abound in Africa, Axelle Kabou downplays the minimal financial and capital resources being sent to Africa and blames the country’s developmental delay on internal and quasi-cultural factors.³² According to her, the African continent, paralyzed by the trauma of its colonial past, has categorically refused to move forward into an age of technological, scientific and industrial modernity.

For Stephen Smith, on the other hand, the root of Africa’s problems lies in its standstill attitude and inability to adopt a new identity, both of which he posits are intrinsic in the African culture.³³ He feels that Africa’s obstinacy in holding onto an idealized past structured by Black Consciousness is at the origin of all of Africa’s missed opportunities. After having suggested that it would only be a matter of replacing Nigeria’s population with that of Japan, or the population of the Democratic Republic of the Congo with that of France, or the population of Chad with that of Israel, to have these African countries escape their oblivion; Smith nevertheless

refuses to call Africans “incapable” or “poor in spirit.” Rather he suggests that material civilization, social organization and political culture in Africa constitute obstacles to development: “Africa does not turn around because it is blocked by sociocultural obstacles that it considers to be sacred keepers of its identity.”³⁴

This type of analysis has caused a shock wave in African and global intellectual circles. Blaming the economic delay of Africa, as well as all the crises handicapping its development, on such things as the continent’s spirit, nature, cultural traits and so forth, rather than on the global economic system, its logic and architecture, and the resulting world disparities, lends credence to the “naturalizing” discourse that maintains that “the form a society takes is merely the result of the pursuit of each individual of survival imperatives dictated by nature.”³⁵ There is only a thin line between this approach, of eliminating the structural factors underlying the gap between Africa and wealthy countries, and racism.

Contrary to this Manichean interpretation, the analysis proposed by the second trend and with which civil society is generally associated, approaches African issues via a number of interconnected aspects. And even though it recognizes the endogenous nature of the foundations of the African impasse, the second trend does not interpret them from the angle of identity or culture; neither does it reduce its policy-related criticism to a generalized condemnation of all the modes of governance in Africa. This school of thought includes such intellectuals as Samir Amin, Jean Ziegler and Jean-Marc Ela. Beyond the fact that they condemn the inequity in North/South relations, neoliberalism and globalization, they are all close to adhere to the principle of civil society.

For Samir Amin, the problem does not reside in Africa’s inability to integrate into globalization or a capitalist economy. Rather it lies in the asymmetrical logic of the global economic system by virtue of which the nations in the centre continue to accumulate wealth to the detriment of those at the outskirts. Globalization does nothing to help find solutions; rather it diminishes the ability of African societies to overcome modern challenges.³⁶

With regard to phenomena such as corruption, the misuse of public funds and the pillage of natural resources, Jean Ziegler and Jean-Marc Ela are quick to acknowledge Africa’s accountability. But depending on the case, they also extend this responsibility to outside forces and players. In his condemnation of the predators of the global economy, Ziegler demonstrates a correlation between the privatization of the functions of the state, the liberalization of trade, the criminal exploitation of natural resources and the civil war in Angola, Liberia and Sierra Leone.³⁷

Along these same lines, Jean-Marc Ela concedes that Africa is also “ill of its own accord.”³⁸ But, he adds, the organized pillage and corruption practiced by African leaders are actions made possible by the organized crime networks and lobby groups that control strategic resources and thereby prop up dictatorships. It is therefore no more possible to exclude an analysis of the political economy of Africa’s underground resources, inherent in the conflictual dynamic of globalization, than it is to separate the pauperization of the continent from the criminalization of the economy and the consequences of neoliberal politics imposed by the IMF and the World Bank (*Idem*).

Sub-Saharan Africa is often depicted as an area of misery, fraught with natural and humanitarian catastrophes. Although this is not altogether untrue, this kind of portrait, as we have just seen, can feed into the endogenous and exogenous factors of these crises. Civil society in Africa is conscious of the burden of these challenges. Fighting alongside the millions of Africans who struggle daily to turn the situation around, civil society has its say in the causes of and possible solutions to crises in Africa. Three problems, of capital importance for African stability, were of particular concern to participants in the PAC consultations: (1) peace and human security, (2) democratic governance and (3) socioeconomic rights.

IV.1 PEACE AND HUMAN SECURITY

The political landscape in Sub-Saharan Africa is not a very rosy one. Of the 19 countries worldwide where armed forces intervened in the 1990s, 15 were located in Sub-Saharan Africa,³⁹ namely Burundi, the Central African Republic, Comoros, the Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Somalia. To this list can be added Liberia, Sudan and northern Uganda, torn by civil war.

Two statements can be made about this state of affairs. First, in the majority of the countries where armed forces intervened, there was, or had recently been, a war. There is therefore a causal link between military interference or overthrowing of the constitutional order and armed conflict. Second, of the 48 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, some 20 had been through a civil war within the 15 previous years. Thus practically half of the population of Sub-Saharan Africa had endured, or were still enduring, the devastation of war.

This portrait reveals the severity of the political, social and economic fracture caused by civil war in Africa. In fact, although Sub-Saharan Africa makes up a mere 10% of the world population, it is the second most concentrated area, after Asia, of refugees and internally displaced people, who together account for 15 million people, 80% of whom are women or children.⁴⁰ Women are particularly vulnerable to widespread and devastating physical and sexual violence. This was notably the case in Darfur, the Great Lakes region and Sierra Leone. Moreover, most war-related deaths and the majority of child soldiers are found in Sub-Saharan Africa, where the illicit trade of small arms is also rampant.

Civil wars and their impacts on the population

Country of origin	Number of refugees	Number of internally displaced people	Number of casualties
Sudan	490,000	4,000,000	2,000,000
Angola	421,000	4,000,000	1,000,000
Burundi	570,000	1,000,000	200,000
DR Congo	395,000	2,000,000	3,000,000
Sierra Leone	500,000	4,500,000	75,000
Liberia	*	2,400,000	150,000
Côte d'Ivoire	400,000	800,000	*

Sources: Compilation: (1) Refugees. Volume 2. No. 131. 2003: Africa at a Crossroads. (2) 2003 UNDP report, (3) PAC report (2000). *The Heart of the Matter—Sierra Leone, Diamonds and Human Security*.

* No accurate figure is available

With regard to this table, it is not an exaggeration to say that Africa tops the world list in terms of insecurity. However, it is neither in countries at war, where displaced people are concentrated, nor in neighbouring countries such as Tanzania, Chad, Kenya, Zambia, Uganda, Guinea or elsewhere, where the victims of war find refuge, that the majority of the budget allotted to human security ends up. In 2003, the High Commissioner for Refugees (HCR) came to the aid of a mere 4.6 million of 15 million uprooted individuals in Africa.⁴¹ In total, they represented 22% of the 20,556,700 people throughout the world under the HCR's charge.

In 2003, the UN body had a budget of \$400 million set aside for Africa, out of a total budget of \$1.16 billion. In other words, the money spent daily in 2003 by the HCR in Africa was less than \$1 per refugee. Considering the \$80 billion spent by the United States in 2003 on the war in Iraq, a war that is both unjust and unjustified, it is easy to draw some significant conclusions about the attention given the victims of "African terror," to use the expression coined by Colette Braeckman.⁴²

The illicit small arms trade is another factor underlying armed conflicts in Africa. It has been shown that there is a correlation between arms trafficking and the criminal exploitation of natural resources. The examples of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola and Sierra Leone/Liberia are prime examples of this. To this effect, a number of African and international initiatives have been led in order to eradicate the illegal small arms trade, the estimated annual market for which reaches \$100 million in Africa and \$500 million worldwide.

In July 2001, the UN Conference on Small Arms oversaw the release of the UN Action Programme for Combating the Illicit Trafficking in Small Arms and Light Weapons. The recommendations of this Conference obviously went unheeded, given that in a follow-up report in December 2003, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan asked the following of the Security Council: “The Council is strongly encouraged to continue its efforts aimed at identifying the links between the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons and the illicit exploitation of natural and other resources, as well as the trade in illegal drugs, and to develop innovative strategies to address this phenomenon. In this connection, careful consideration should be given to the findings and recommendations of the bodies established to investigate such links, including the Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Panel of Experts on Liberia and the Monitoring mechanism on Sanctions against UNITA.”⁴³

At the regional level, four initiatives are worth emphasizing. These are the ECOWAS Moratorium on Small Arms set in place in October 1998, the December 2002 Bamako Declaration on small arms control in West Africa, the March 2003 Nairobi Declaration related to the small arms proliferation in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region, and the new African Union Peace and Security Council, which was officially launched on May 25, 2004.

In their Statement of Commitment to Peace and Security in Africa, African heads of state and government acknowledged that numerous treaties on peace and security had not been translated into action and that they planned to give this new council the authority required to be more dynamic in this regard.

The heads of state and government also committed to building a holistic vision of peace and security by eliminating the causes of conflict and the fundamental problems that contributed to them, namely “ethnic and religious extremism; corruption; exclusionary definitions of citizenship; poverty and diseases, with specific attention on the HIV/AIDS epidemic, which has become a security problem on our continent; the illegal exploitation of Africa’s renewable and non-renewable natural resources; mercenarism; the illicit proliferation, circulation and trafficking of small arms and light weapons, and the continuing toll exacted by anti-personnel landmines.”⁴⁴

The question that we must ask is this: Why do such initiatives not succeed in curbing the trafficking of small arms? As demonstrated by Steve Wright,⁴⁵ the logic underpinning the arms trade inherently holds a piece to the puzzle. The distinction between licit and illicit trade is far from clear-cut. This arms laundering situation is made possible because national regulations can be easily bypassed since the arms may never even enter the area where a deal is brokered and the dealer never actually owns the weapons in question.

Given this type of manipulation, the accountability for arms trafficking must clearly fall upon Western countries, licence holders, armies and African armed groups as well as numerous intermediaries, whether they be foreign dealers or African middlemen.

But most important, these armed conflicts and the indelible marks they leave on the African population should prompt us to take a long, hard look at peace and stability in Africa, conditions without which development and democracy are nothing more than an illusion.

Conclusion on peace, security and natural resources

Faced with the threat of continent-wide collapse, what response or alternative can civil society propose to an Africa that is trying to put the gaping wounds of the past and the absurdity of corrupt regimes behind it and focus on the hope for future freedom and democracy? It would be highly pretentious to attribute any miracle solutions to civil society.

Nevertheless, unless a definitive response is found to this challenge, civil society has the advantage of being able to offer a solid diagnostic, examine fundamental issues and define the parameters for peace.

Overcoming a conflict necessarily entails an examination of the nature of the said conflict. Most conflicts in Africa are post-colonial, which means that, with a few exceptions, they represent the extension of crises that date back to colonial times and that are now exploding in the face of an Africa that is theoretically emancipated but whose liberation is in actual fact at a standstill, between the hammer of its colonial past, the anvil of post-decolonization dictatorships and the economic haemorrhage that transformed African war into a lucrative activity.

These armed conflicts are also fuelled by the paralyzed economy, which victimizes the country's youths, exposing them to crises in education, agriculture and unemployment. Moreover, as was emphasized by participants at the PAC consultations in Bamako, some conflicts arise because of poor land management and convey the disenchantment that prevails in regions where natural riches abound but where the community does not reap any economic benefits.

The participants at the PAC consultations insisted on emphasizing that good governance lies primarily in the ability and opportunity for people to participate in political dialogue.

Bearing these points in mind, it is obvious that the resolution of armed conflicts in Africa depends on the joint efforts of many. Controlling arms and putting a stop to the looting of natural resources must be integrated into a real poverty reduction programme and a holistic vision of democracy. But the wars in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sierra Leone, where the involvement of neighbouring nations has had a particularly harmful impact on the African conscience, have shown to what extent African accountability plays a crucial role in the crumbling of the continent. This situation has never been encountered before and casts a shadow over the pan-African project that the African Union seeks to accomplish. Justice, in this case, must be applied to all national, regional and foreign stakeholders who have played a part in these wars.

Civil society condemns military blunders and foreign intrusions. It calls for the end of impunity, the end of violence toward women, the end of the use of child soldiers, the end of looting of natural resources and the implementation of conditions for sustainable peace. Peace and reconciliation are wagers whose chances do not rely solely on talks between political and military stakeholders. Civil society's involvement has become an important parameter not only in negotiating peace but also in the reconstruction process.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for one, civil society has established the foundations for peace and national reconciliation. The *Campagne nationale pour la paix durable en RDC* (CNPDP) is an initiative to which the current transition process owes a great deal. "Sustainable peace" is much more than a simple buzzword. This objective has been built around a true national vision. Unlike other practices currently in use in the DRC, the plan for peace was not developed solely by the various armed factions. Congolese civil society, under a joint "*Forces vives*" banner, contributed to defining the terms of the plan. The end of hostilities, the withdrawal

of foreign troops, the establishment of a national dialogue, the inclusion of women, the relaunching of the democratization process, national reconstruction and so forth have been the main points highlighted by civil society spokespeople⁴⁶ as part of the inter-Congolese dialogue.

Also in the DRC, the involvement of organizations such as the National Center for Development and Popular Participation (CENADEP) in the Kimberley Process, which resulted in the introduction of a diamond certification program, is an example of the role played by civil society in the fight against the pillage of mineral resources and in the pursuit of peace.⁴⁷

Finally, we cannot discuss the involvement of civil society in the peace process without addressing the specific role that women play in this regard. In a message delivered recently to African heads of state and government, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said: "Time and again, women have played a constructive and essential part in peace processes. They are gradually finding a place at the negotiating table, in the implementation of peace agreements, in post-conflict rehabilitation, reconstruction and disarmament. It is high time they were included in those processes in a more formalized way, at all levels and at all stages."⁴⁸

At the local, national and regional level, African women have entered into a stage where they no longer accept being silent partners in the peace process. They also demand the application of Resolution 1325 of the UN Security Council, which acknowledges their right to participate and to be represented. The numerous women's peace collectives that exist in the Great Lakes region, West Africa and elsewhere allow African women to raise their voices in support of peace. The Mano River Union Women's Network for Peace,⁴⁹ a joint initiative of women's groups from Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, reflects the commitment of African women to strive for peace, not only within their own national borders, but also on a broader regional scale.

The participants in the PAC consultations reiterated their willingness to be involved in the peace and reconstruction process. They wish to obtain political recognition to be able to enforce this commitment. Putting an end to the illicit arms trade, to the trafficking of child soldiers and to the plundering of natural resources, and protecting women from rape and other widespread forms of physical abuse during times of armed conflict constitute areas that require immediate attention. To do this, the members of civil society demand that the female gender and female leadership be incorporated into all peace initiatives. They want the presence of civil society in disarmament, demobilization and social reintegration programmes to be reinforced. And they want civil society to be integrated into the participatory management of natural resources.

IV.2 FROM NEPAD TO DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

The importance placed by NEPAD on good governance is unique. However, it raises numerous questions of vital importance. First, good governance is a political notion, whereas NEPAD appears to refer to the concept more in terms of economic and administrative management. Second, this principle, and this principle alone, seems to be blamed for the continent's endemic poverty. Third, everything points to the idea that, once solid governance is established, contributing countries and private investors would be encouraged to further reinforce their partnerships in Africa.

Following the example of the UNDP, this enthusiasm should be tempered. Although it considers governance and efficient political institutions to be at the heart of development in Africa, the UNDP downplays the importance of this condition, stressing that several exogenous factors also come into play.

In its 2003 report on human development,⁵⁰ the UNDP acknowledges the existence of structural problems, namely the logic of the international trade system, the trade barriers imposed by affluent countries, the imbalance in farming subsidies, the dependence of Sub-Saharan Africa on a small number of exportable raw materials, the burden of foreign debt, the geographical constraints, the AIDS pandemic and so forth. These are realities that are beyond the control of poorer countries.

The UNDP has taken a position on the importance granted to governance as one of the key criteria for foreign aid: “Rich countries, and the economic institutions they control, may focus on good governance when determining aid allocations. But far too often they are oblivious to the other challenges facing many of the poorest countries [...]. Too many policy-makers in rich countries believe that poor countries are simply not trying hard enough to develop, failing to understand the deeper structural forces at work.”⁵¹

Along these same lines, Ross Herbert stresses that good governance and democracy, even if they constitute indispensable conditions to the development of Africa, cannot cover up other exogenous realities. There is a profound conviction in Africa, Herbert maintains, that the policies of structural adjustment and market liberalization and privatization are the direct cause of the continent’s problems.⁵²

The failure of negotiations on the Doha Round, during the Cancun Summit, as well as the weak support given by G8 leaders to African requests vis-à-vis agricultural subsidies and customs tariffs, are examples that show that, while governance is an important condition to development, it is only one piece in a much larger puzzle.

Indeed, during the last G8 Summit held in June 2004 in Georgia, United States, the delegation of six African heads of state could not hide their disappointment regarding the standstill on the issue of subsidies granted by wealthy countries⁵³ to their own farmers. As for the framework agreement signed in Geneva on August 1, 2004, it does represent an encouraging step forward in that it legitimizes the principle of substantially reducing the aid given by wealthy countries to domestic agriculture. However, according to many observers, the text of this agreement is vague and there is no deadline set for negotiations. This means that it is entirely foreseeable that the 147 member countries of the World Trade Organization (WTO) will end up in interminable discussions in this regard (*Libération*, August 2, 2004).

The issue of farming subsidies and support for agricultural exports shows to what extent wealthy countries practice protectionism, while simultaneously advocating freer trade. It also proves that support for agriculture in wealthy countries is to the detriment of official development assistance. As an example, as revealed in the 2003 UNDP report, cattle and cotton farming in OECD countries received a great deal more assistance in 2000 than did the entire population of Sub-Saharan Africa.⁵⁴

This same report reveals that in 2000 the United States subsidized its cotton farms to the tune of \$10.7 million per day, as compared to their foreign aid to Sub-Saharan Africa which totalled \$3.1 million per day. Similarly, in terms of subsidies for dairy farms, the European Union granted its producers \$913 per head of cattle, compared to \$8 per person in foreign aid to Sub-Saharan Africa.

Partnership, not incorporation

In light of the preceding paragraphs, we are forced to admit that the debate on the adherence to NEPAD on the part of the population, political players and civil society is far from over. To the extent that the democratic practice deals with the extrapolation of the truth about the root causes of African problems, the invitation to maintain a dialogue with civil society is likely to seem like an invitation to a parody of a consultation. And it is therefore in the realm of the non-verbal that it is necessary to analyze the outstretched hand to civil society. An invitation to dialogue is possible only if dialogue actually exists.

It is, however, conceivable that what we are seeing is an appeal not for dialogue but for the confirmation of a consensus among African leaders and their creditors. NEPAD was first submitted to a vote of confidence on the part of the contributing countries and institutions, and only after it was given their green light did African leaders start to promote it within their continent. We can acknowledge that the goal of this outreach process is to promote collective and public participation. But we can also question the confusion between this essentially educational endeavour and the politicization of NEPAD issues which, for their part, should be subjected to real public debate.

While the new paradigm that is governance reflects this kind of practice, i.e., a shift toward consultation, we should admit that governance, in its current form, could be considered as another form of government outside the political sphere.⁵⁵ In this case, it does not call for politicization, i.e., the public discussion of socioeconomic and political issues, but rather endorsement. Throughout Africa and elsewhere in the world, experts hired by the state are the architects of development plans. They are the ones who exercise the rights of citizenship, not the peoples concerned, nor civil society.

In South Africa,⁵⁶ for one, contrary to the initial programme of the ANC which focused on the population's desire for social change, it would seem that GEAR was drafted by a group of 15 economists, only one of whom had been part of the South African democratic movement.

This shift in power from the public and a social movement to the absolute control of the Executive was criticized by participants at the PAC consultation in Freetown. They felt that there was no doubt whatsoever that the Poverty Reduction Strategic Papers (PRSPs) that international financial institutions impose as the only legal framework to settle poverty issues are drafted by consultants who have no first-hand knowledge of or experience with the reality of poverty.

Faced with this phenomenon that suppresses the popular voice while seeming to call for joint action, it is very decidedly urgent to reinforce the mechanisms of political surveillance and accountability at the national, regional and international levels. Unfortunately, it is obvious that the debate under way on proper governance tends to deprioritize political accountability in favour of economic growth.

If African leaders are serious in their desire to recognize the contribution of civil society, they must implement permanent consultation mechanisms, within both the NEPAD Secretariat and local institutions.

Indeed many people have stressed that, with respect to economic governance, world financial institutions and, through them, all bilateral creditors are the only entities with the power to exercise effective pressures in terms of reforming management practices.⁵⁷ It is true that NEPAD has adopted an inter-African examination review mechanism. The African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) was implemented in compliance with the Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance, adopted in July 2002 by the African Union.

It is also true that corruption is unquestionably an obstacle to African development. The concentration of discretionary powers in the hands of government authorities is an antidemocratic process that paves the way for corruption. According to Transparency International, in recent decades, between \$20 billion and \$40 billion has been misappropriated in poor countries, the majority of which are located in Africa.⁵⁸

This loss of these billions of dollars has an enormous impact on the struggle against poverty and provides ammunition to those who are opposed to debt relief initiatives for poorer countries. As reported in the magazine *Afrique Expansion*,⁵⁹ in Tanzania, there have been unjustified increases in the cost of road work ranging from 101% to 353%; in Uganda, 42,000 fictional government workers were reportedly used to artificially inflate the civil service payroll; in Cameroon, the costs of corruption between 1981 and 1986 have been estimated at 1,500 billion CFA francs; and in Nigeria, the construction costs for a steel mill were allegedly overcharged by \$1.6 billion. Examples such as these only confirm the fact that the source of the corruption problem must be sought out in the absence of mechanisms at the national level capable of enforcing transparency in the state's management of public affairs.

Civil society is well positioned to provide this kind of surveillance. But the issue must be approached from a political perspective, rather than from outside democratic regulatory bodies. Unfortunately, given the predominance of the sectors covered by the APRM, which relate more to economic growth, a doubt exists as to the priority granted a holistic vision of governance. In fact, of the four fields targeted by the APRM, only one addresses democratic and political governance. The three others concern the governance of economic management, corporate governance and socio-economic development.

This observation also reveals that there is a grey area between civil society and the private sector. The numerous declarations and documents issued by NEPAD (as well as the UN and the African Union) show that every time the question of partnership comes up, private enterprises and civil society organizations are lumped together, whereas by virtue of their very nature they are completely different entities.

To illustrate this point, during the fifth meeting of the Panel of Eminent Persons of the APRM, a paragraph from a press release related to civil society also addressed the private sector: “As a policy, the panel has decided to put a strong emphasis on finding ways to involve the civil society in the APRM at the country level. The importance of involving the private sector has also been stressed. The Panel noted the importance of information dissemination to civil society and the private sector both at national and continental levels.”⁶⁰

There is no shortage of socio-economic statistics for Africa. Recently, in line with earlier reports, the 2003 UNDP Human Development Report once again sounded an alarm to the effect that, if an offensive is not launched, Sub-Saharan Africa will not be able to accomplish its poverty-reduction objectives until 2147.

In addition, if we take into account the existence of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, whose function is to oversee African countries’ compliance with human rights, it is evident that the accountability of African countries, via the APRM, will exist particularly in economic terms, with economic growth being the key paradigm of NEPAD. The fact that businesses, under the umbrella of the NEPAD Business Group, have a permanent representative on the NEPAD Secretariat when the representation of civil society is not assured is proof of the priority granted the private sector.

The challenge that is before the APRM is to ensure that its recommendations are not limited to management accountability. They must be and used to reinforce proposals of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights, because governance is a broad notion. If not, the problem of overlapping frameworks may once again be an issue. It would be advantageous for the African Union and NEPAD to clarify the roles of these two bodies, both of which are devoted to promoting accountability among African leaders.

But the recognition of civil society poses another equally important question: under what terms must partnership with civil society be entered into? While the interest in associating civil society with political dialogue is clear, the interpretation that can be made of this association is not. Although Chapter IV of NEPAD, entitled “Appeal to the Peoples of Africa,” invites the African population to take part in rebuilding the country, it nevertheless leaves the impression that this participation was inexistent before the creation of NEPAD. However, if one admits that the members of civil society are to some extent non-elected players on the socio-political scene, it would have been more appropriate to indicate in this chapter that public organizations, social/community movements and research groups on social justice have always worked toward the politicization of the population, i.e., its appropriation of political, social and economic issues.

The manner in which this appeal to the public has been launched by NEPAD also implies that, while public involvement has thus far been weak, it is because the population has not yet understood the necessity of participating in the development of Africa. This barely veiled paternalistic attitude holds a risk of overlooking the democratic deficit that still plagues a number of African governments and explains why, despite public ingenuity and will, exercising the right to participate, where this right has been granted, has often been limited to the right to vote rather than the right to be involved once the ballots are counted.

While it is perceived as an African initiative and while it is true that in certain regards it represents African renewal, NEPAD is nevertheless a project that was conceived without consulting the public. However, despite these criticisms, it is important not to overlook the fact that NEPAD has numerous positive aspects and that it is first and foremost intended as a statement of commitment. NEPAD is an evolving process rather than a ready-made plan. African civil society therefore has an important role to play in the outreach and implementation process as regards the positive elements of NEPAD. However, these still need to be subjected to political dialogue at the regional and national levels.

Conclusion on NEPAD and democratic governance

Civil society has an expertise worth sharing, an ideal worth defending. This expertise and this ideal are based in a deep-rooted conviction: the future of Africa depends on the commitment of Africans and on international solidarity. While If African leaders are serious in their desire to recognize the contribution of civil society, they must implement permanent consultation mechanisms, within both the NEPAD Secretariat and local institutions.

The continent cannot move forward while there is still instability in the social structure generated by African political unrest and inequity in North-South relations. Associating civil society with political dialogue absolutely requires listening to what its members have to say about the inequalities between Africa and the other continents as well as about poor governance.

The participants at the PAC consultations insisted on emphasizing that good governance lies primarily in the ability and opportunity for people to participate in political dialogue. It is for this reason that they wish to increase civic education and public mobilization efforts. It is also for this reason that they wish to encourage dialogue among elected officials and civil society.

The organizations present also reminded leaders of the necessity of focusing on African diplomacy in order to improve their position in multilateral negotiations. They asked that regional integration be seriously considered as a pillar of development that is profitable for the continent as a whole.

To achieve these objectives, participants asked that the mechanisms of regional dialogue between the members of civil society be reinforced and that the cooperation with the African Peer Review Mechanism be improved. However, they pointed out, political and economy accountability is not an exclusively internal concern. It must also be reciprocally applied to North-South relations.

As much as it is necessary to reinforce anti-corruption initiatives and fight impunity in the private and public sectors (e.g., the “Publish What You Pay” campaign), it is also vital to question the policies imposed on Africa that contribute to increasing public vulnerability in terms of poverty and armed conflicts. The support for the dialogue with civil society cannot and should not be limited to internal affairs. It must be extended to discussions on poverty reduction, international trade, tariff barriers and agricultural subsidies.

Despite many reservations expressed about NEPAD, African civil society organizations have shown their willingness to work to make it a success. Initiatives have already been launched in order to build a collective vision of NEPAD and to better define the contribution that civil society can make to it. Such is the case of the NEPAD Civil Society Forum in Mbodiene, Senegal, which brought together 135 participants from 15 Western African countries.

Organized by the RADI in February 2003, the Forum addressed the impact of NEPAD on the work of civil society organizations. It was also designed to target priority sectors where civil society organizations could intervene. The resulting declaration comprises a number of worthwhile recommendations. Among them are the reinforcement of civil society's abilities, the establishment of a dialogue between civil society, the private sector and the state, and the organization of public forums in order to bring NEPAD to the people.

In addition, a joint publication of the Christian Relief and Development Association of Ethiopia and PAC proposes the creation of mechanisms that would enable civil society organizations to participate in the implementation of NEPAD.⁶¹ The promotion of NEPAD, mobilization of support for NEPAD, assessment and follow-up of NEPAD, cooperation with the African Peer Review Mechanism and other initiatives constitute avenues of partnership between NEPAD and civil society organizations.

But this partnership must be recognized without infringing upon the independent nature of civil society. It is here that civil society organizations will be considered to be true partners of NEPAD.

IV.3 SOCIO-ECONOMIC RIGHTS

There is no shortage of socio-economic statistics for Africa. Recently, in line with earlier reports, the 2003 UNDP Human Development Report once again sounded an alarm to the effect that, if an offensive is not launched, Sub-Saharan Africa will not be able to accomplish its poverty-reduction objectives until 2147. This means that at the current pace it will take a century and a half to reduce by 50% the proportion of the African population whose income is under \$1 a day, guarantee an elementary-school education to all African children, eliminate gender inequality, decrease the child and maternal mortality rate, eradicate malaria and AIDS, and ensure the sustainability of environmental resources.

This outlook reiterates that several generations of Africans are poised to, once again, become the forgotten masses of history. Half of the people in Sub-Saharan Africa earn less than \$1 a day. This same proportion has no access to clean drinking water or sufficient amounts of food.

In the areas of education, literacy and health, the situation is even more distressing: 41% of African children do not have access to basic education and two thirds of those who do go to school do not make it to the high-school level.⁶² Adult illiteracy remains widespread, especially among women.

Country	Illiteracy among men (%)	Illiteracy among women (%)
Senegal	50.9	70.3
Mali	48.0	62.1
Cameroon	16.1	27.9
Congo	11.1	22.9
D.R. Congo	24.8	46.5
Kenya	10.0	21.5
Ethiopia	50.7	66.3
Angola	44.0	72.0
Zimbabwe	6.2	13.7
South Africa	13.3	14.6
Sierra Leone	49.3	77.4

Source: L'État du monde 2004

In terms of health, less than 35% of the African population has access to basic medical care.⁶³ The system is privatized and has become a luxury for the affluent rather than a universal right. There no longer seems to be any outrage at the fact that malaria causes more deaths in Africa than anywhere else in the world. And the AIDS pandemic has become a brutal indicator of the gap between this continent and the rest of the world.

The endemic poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa reflects the lack of socio-economic power, which in turn indicates the incapacity to translate Africa's commitment to elementary human rights into action. However, we cannot focus on one area of criticism of African incapacity, as justified as it may be, without examining the other factors that contribute to paralyzing the achievement of socio-economic rights.

In this regard, participants in the PAC consultations identified the world economy as the primary culprit in creating more outcasts in Africa than anywhere else in the world. They did not, however, spare any criticism when it came to Africa's role in the escalation of poverty. Corruption, democratic deficit, armed conflicts, criminal exploitation of natural resources and so forth are all contributing factors.

African leaders definitely have played a role in the current economic crisis, but they are far from being the main cause. Current discussions are focusing more on the notion of "accountability" than the imbalance in North-South relations, and that plays to the disadvantage of poorer countries. Rather than attack the nature of the problem, these discussions are trying to bypass it altogether by proposing what participants at the PAC consultations see as a series of "band-aid solutions."

The minimal budgets for public expenditures on such sectors as health care, education and housing are not solely the result of a lack of awareness in Africa—one needs only think of military spending, for example. The situation is also due to some extent, at least, to the overall size of African budgets, which are very small compared to the needs of the population and, obviously, not even comparable to the multi-billion-dollar budgets of wealthy countries.

Country	Public spending on education (% of GDNP, 2001)	Public spending on health care (% of GDNPP, 2001)	Military spending (% of GNDP, 2002)	Debt service (% of GNPPIB, 2002)
Cameroon	5.4	1.2	1.4	3.9
Zimbabwe	10.4	2.8	3.2	0.7
Kenya	6.2	1.7	1.7	3.7
Senegal	3.2	2.8	1.5	4.3
Angola	2.8	2.8	3.7	7.7
D.R. Congo	*	1.5	*	16.2
Ethiopia	4.8	1.4	5.2	1.8
Mali	2.8	1.7	2.0 (2001)	2.7
Sierra Leone	1.0 (2001)	2.6	2.2	2.9
South Africa	5.7	3.6	1.6	4.5
Congo	3.2	1.4		0.8

Source: 2004 UNDP report

* No accurate figure is available

In terms of percentages, public spending on education accounts for, on average, 12% to 23% of all expenditures (UNDP, 2003). This is a mere pittance, given that the overall budgets are already woefully small. Cuts in development assistance have meant cuts in education. Between 1990 and 2000, foreign aid granted to basic education in Africa was reduced by \$3 billion, and only 2% of the assistance granted by wealthy countries is devoted to education.⁶⁴ The consequence of this withdrawal has been to plunge no fewer than 100 million African children (roughly two thirds of whom are girls) into a life of misery and destitution.

Similarly, every year the flailing public health system, intensified by the privatization of health care, sends millions of Africans to their death, victims of malaria, AIDS and other diseases and poverty-related afflictions. Africa loses roughly 1 million people to malaria and 3 million to AIDS every year. The past decade has been marked by profound changes caused by AIDS in African societies, including record numbers of orphans and impacts on farming production, the job market, the condition of women and so forth.

African leaders definitely have played a role in the current economic crisis, but they are far from being the main cause. Current discussions are focusing more on the notion of “accountability” than the imbalance in North-South relations, and that plays to the disadvantage of poorer countries.

As countless people have pointed out, the HIV/AIDS crisis in Africa is tantamount to a health care apartheid, and Africans are the ones who are footing the bill. The scope of the problem means that it is not enough to be indignant or come up with piecemeal solutions. It is vital to establish a structural diagnosis without which sustainable solutions are impossible to conceive. If Africans are not granted the right to proper health care, it is in part because the market is controlled by the pharmaceutical industry, sustained by wealthy countries that subsidize it and act as a watchdog via the WTO. It is also due in part to policies designed to clean up public spending imposed on Africa over the past 20 years, the result of which has been to hamstring several key sectors, including health care.⁶⁵

Admittedly, there is room for debate on the shortfalls or limits of Africa's almost exclusive dependence on foreign aid, but the fact is that, as the situation currently stands, we cannot pretend to be able to ease African poverty and the devastating consequences on the population without a massive investment in public expenditures, which means an increase—at least in the short and medium term—in official development assistance, but also substantial debt service reduction.

On this subject, NEPAD is unequivocal. After having estimated the annual amount Africa needs to overcome poverty at \$64 billion, NEPAD affirms that in the short and medium term the majority of the required financial resources will come from outside the continent, through such initiatives as debt relief and increased official development assistance, while private capital contributions are more of a long-term solution.⁶⁶

Official development assistance

Debt relief and an increase in official public development assistance undeniably represent the best chances, in the short term, of redeploying public spending in Sub-Saharan Africa. The 1990s saw a 40% drop in development assistance to Africa⁶⁷. During the same period, \$144 billion left Africa in the form of debt service, whereas a mere \$21.4 billion was injected in the form of development assistance. In other words, seven times more money left Africa than went into it.⁶⁸

The consequences of these practices have been, and continue to be, disastrous in the lives of the African people, in particular women who have been saddled with the burden of making up for this shortfall. Many promises have been made in recent years to set things right. Among the most significant initiatives have been the Monterrey Conference on financing for development (March 2002), which resulted in an agreement on the part of wealthy countries to double the amount of development assistance by 2006. Similarly, at the most recent G8 Summit held in Georgia, United States, in June 2004, the eight heads of state agreed to a two-year extension of their debt reduction initiatives for heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC).

Although we should be glad that such measures have been undertaken, we must not lose sight of the fact that they are masking realities that are much more complex and far-reaching. First, the promises made at Monterrey with respect to the increase in development assistance have remained silent in terms of the target of 0.7% GDP as advocated by the UNDP. With the exception of France and Great Britain, which have both pledged to achieve this objective by 2012 and 2013, respectively, many other economic powers, notably the United States, have not made any firm commitment in this respect. Achieving the 0.7% mark remains for the time being a hypothetical objective. Also, the debt reduction initiative creates the challenge of moving from an approach based on debt sustainability to a scenario focusing on long-term poverty reduction, which requires the mobilization of additional, stable and counter-cyclical funding.⁶⁹

In addition, given the fact that debt relief and the injection of new funds is integrated into the poverty reduction strategy advocated by the IMF and the World Bank and that proper governance constitutes the cornerstone of this new strategy, it is easy to see that this is a poorly disguised version of structural adjustment programmes and a form of paternalism in terms of shared responsibility. As stressed by Pascale Hatcher: "The hypotheses on which PRSPs are based are directly in line with the structural adjustment policies defended for over 20 years by IIFIs. Not only do they not deviate from standard multilateral policies, they do not seem to differ at all from the policies of the past [...]."⁷⁰

Faced with the thought of repeating the political mistakes that created such an extreme level of disillusionment among the African population, can we hope for a miracle when it comes to the redeployment of the role of the state in terms of social and economic issues? The question itself provides the answer. Evidently, by substituting the objective of substantially increasing development assistance with the objective to enhance the effectiveness of this assistance, the creditor community is shifting the focus of the debate toward the real causes of poverty.

Similarly, by placing more importance on good governance, i.e., the creation of a market-friendly environment, wealthy countries are refusing to confront the structural obstacles that block the integration of Africa into a market economy, i.e., the persistence of excessive customs tariffs for African exporters, the dumping of exporters from wealthy countries, the sharp decline in prices for agricultural goods on the worldwide market, the absence of processing industries in Africa, the dependence of a limited number of export products and so forth.

It is for all of these reasons that African civil society organizations are capitalizing on all their strengths to make a radical change over and above the superficial measures proposed in current development policies.

Conclusion on social and economic rights

The commitment of civil society organizations in the area of socio-economic rights is unfailing. It is present as much in research and services as it is in public education.

With respect to research, the current debate on development assistance has shown the existence of a number of research networks in Africa and elsewhere. These networks have contributed to developing analyses that shed light on both the foundations of the development crises as well as the possible alternatives.

African governments also need to pay attention to the criticisms expressed by civil society because they are primarily intended to be constructive and respectful of public alternatives—alternatives rooted in the experience of millions of Africans, from the people at the grass-roots level who, to paraphrase Nelson Mandela, represent the continent’s greatest wealth.

One of the examples worth citing concerns the criticism of African foreign debt. The Jubilee 2000 campaign, thanks to which a true pan-African movement was born, composed mostly of African civil society organizations, was based on a multitude of efforts including those made as part of the international and Pan-African conference on debt cancellation in Africa and the Third World (Dakar 2000), which underscored the inequity of foreign debt for poor countries.

Simultaneously, demonstrations and petitions supporting the cancellation of African debt held in Johannesburg, Accra, Bamako, Porto Novo, Dakar and elsewhere caught the attention of international financial institutions. The outcome was admittedly not quite what was hoped, and the broadening of the HIPC initiative to include 18 African countries does not constitute an adequate response. But the debt cancellation movement continues to move forward, fine-tune its strategies and make the most of every opportunity to remind the public how much to what extent debt repayment hinders social programmes.

Participants at the PAC consultations asked for more support in terms of research and advocacy vis-à-vis debt cancellation. They also want political acknowledgement for their contribution to the African dialogue and their input on concerning the increase in aid levels and other sources of funding.

In terms of the supply of service deliveries, civil society organizations have been particularly effective in advising and guiding the public, promoting literacy, providing public education and managing projects designed to fight poverty. The education, health care and agricultural crises were the focus of particular attention at the PAC consultations. Participants demanded that Africa adopt sustainable farming techniques in order to ensure the ongoing security of the food supply. New investments are essential to be able to increase farming production and bring agricultural products to market.

With regard to education, participants demanded that it be universal and extended to communities that are currently not served. They have asked that civil society organizations and NGOs incorporate literacy into their programming, specifically literacy among women. They also requested that education and professional training be considered as a development investment in order to be able to respond to the needs of youth, especially those living in crisis areas.

Lastly, the issue of health care was also a major concern for participants, especially as it pertains to maternity health care, primary health care, malaria and HIV/AIDS. They expressed their desire to see the public health system restored after having been gutted by policies to cut back on social spending. Getting the system back on its feet requires the reinforcement of health care facilities, an increase in human resources and solid counter-cyclical financial commitments.

The issue of AIDS was omnipresent. Participants pointed out that everywhere in Africa civil society organizations had been preparing for the AIDS crisis even before any government policies were adopted in this regard. Indeed, as the AIDS pandemic has unravelled the social fabric by creating serious crises, such as the explosion in the number of orphans, local initiatives have been theretofore to confront these new challenges. By and large, community organizations have been the ones at the front line of education and prevention.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, women not only make up 58% of HIV carriers, they also bear the responsibility for caring for millions of victims and orphans, especially considering the cutbacks in government support under neoliberal policy. In Rwanda, for one, women's groups carry out 90% of local AIDS initiatives. Everywhere else in Africa, SWAA (Society of Women Against AIDS in Africa) associations offer moral and material support to women afflicted with AIDS and AIDS orphans, in addition to supporting prevention campaigns.

Concerning the delicate issue of access to AIDS treatment, it is again the civil society organizations, humanitarian NGOs, trade unions and social movements that were first to protest against the exorbitant costs of antiretroviral treatments, at the same time as they were pushing for increased investment in the health system and more support for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria. The struggle is by no means over, but thanks to the work of such groups as the Pan-African HIV/AIDS Treatment Access Movement, we have seen the adoption of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) under which the pharmaceutical industry, the WTO and the governments agreed to the principle of the right of access to essential drugs/medications.

The participants in the PAC consultations therefore requested better support for their community initiatives to fight HIV/AIDS, in particular those efforts aimed at helping AIDS orphans and promoting female leadership.

V. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS: ISSUES AND PROSPECTS FOR A REAL POLITICAL DIALOGUE

The mobilization and organization of African civil society constitutes an important asset in the progress of the continent. A commitment at this level requires better political recognition than is currently the case. This recognition must be achieved, however, without hindering civil society's independence.

At the regional levelscale, there are number of experiences where the involvement of civil society has been fostered, as well as mechanisms that civil society could use to ensure its voice is heard in political dialogue. The African Union has already established a civil society consultative framework in the form of ECOSOCC. As for NEPAD, it has arranged several forums designed to improve cooperation among civil society organizations. However, no permanent structure has yet been established and the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) which, for the moment, is the only advisory body linking NEPAD and African civil society, does not seem to

respond adequately to consultation-related needs. Thus at the regional level, although the African Union has duly established a partnership framework with civil society organizations, NEPAD has not yet risen to the challenge. Consequently, it is more necessary than ever to establish a subgroup that, like the NEPAD Business Group, would ensure a permanent voice for civil society at the NEPAD Secretariat.

At the national level, each country has its own civil society consultative framework. As an example, national AIDS policies have generally been defined following a series of consultations with women's groups, youth associations, human rights leagues and so forth. In addition, there are in many of the concerned countries concerned, national AIDS commissions upon which sit civil society representatives. Several other examples can be cited, in particular the collaboration between government bodies and civil society for the purpose of furthering public education.

As a result, there are partnership practices and experiences already in use, but this does not mean that the positions of civil society are considered with the attention they deserve—far from it. The first major challenge identified by the African civil society organizations present at the Partnership Africa Canada consultations concerns the ability to increase their effectiveness. They all seek to have their organizational and operational capacity reinforced at the regional, national and international levels.

Among other strategies designed to enhance their effectiveness, these organizations targeted collaboration with national sectoral coalitions, information sharing, increased opportunities for discussion, collaboration with government representatives and the reinforcement of links between national, regional and international advocacy initiatives.

The second major challenge on the horizon concerns the recognition of the involvement of civil society in issues regarding Africa's relations with wealthy countries, multilateral organizations and global financial institutions. The issues of official development assistance, both for African foreign debt and international trade, are of particular interest to both African governments and civil society organizations. The latter have made remarkable headway in mobilizing stakeholders in Africa and around the world.

Civil society campaigns to secure access to generic drugs have had an impact on positions held by the pharmaceutical industry. Campaigns related to foreign debt have contributed to increasing the number of countries eligible for debt relief measures. The same applies to the question of farming subsidies and tariff barriers, which penalize African producers and exporters and which civil society vehemently opposes.

Does all this come from a single voice at the grass-roots level, as detractors of civil society like to suggest? No. This is a united African voice that comes from the street, from women's groups, from research networks, from religious groups, from youth associations, from activists for peace, sustainable development and the environment and many others. This is a voice of change, a voice from and for Africa.

African governments, rather than ignoring civil society—this voice of support, of revitalization and of collaboration—should acknowledge that civil society organizations can be an ideal “right arm” for all questions relating to the inequity in North-South relations. African governments also need to pay attention to the criticisms expressed by civil society because they are primarily intended to be constructive and respectful of public alternatives—alternatives rooted in the experience of millions of Africans, from the people at the grass-roots level who, to paraphrase Nelson Mandela, represent the continent's greatest wealth.

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